

a man's
life

just
depending upon
which one
gets to him
first.

A PROBLEM

we met at dinner
a place off the
harbor.
Paul, his wife,
Tina.
me, my wife,
Sarah.

we finished
dinner.
I suggested
drinks at our
place.

they followed
our BMW in
their
Mercedes.

around drinks
we got into
politics and
religion.
I looked at
Paul and
noticed that
his face had
turned into a
cardboard
face, his
eyes into
marbles.

then I saw
my face
in the mirror
above the
mantle.

I had the
head of an
alligator.

I poured
more
drinks.

the conversation
got into
after-life,
abortion and
the Russians.

then somebody
started in
on ethnic
jokes
and the night
was over.

we walked them
to the
door.
they got into
their Mercedes
and backed out
down the
drive.

we waved
they blinked
their
lights.

we went
back
inside.

"I wonder what
they are saying
about
us?" I
ventured.

"what are we
going to say
about
them?" Sarah
asked.

"nothing," I
answered.

"did you ever
notice?"
she asked.

"what?"

"sometimes you
have
a head
like an
alligator."

"I've noticed."

"we don't have
any friends,"
Sarah
said.

RED TENNIS SHOES

he sits
3 or 4 rows
below me.

his hand
trembles
as he takes
a cigar
from his
mouth.

he stands up,
stretches,
tucks his shirt
into his
pants.

he finds
a large piece of
yellow paper
in one of his
pockets.

he sits down
with the yellow
paper
in one hand
and the
cigar

in the
other.

both hands
tremble.

he studies the
yellow paper,
puts the cigar
into his
mouth,
inhales.

he coughs
keeping the
cigar
in his
mouth.

he stops
coughing,
adjusts the
cigar,
straightens his
glasses,
rises to
bet.

he is in
his mid-
sixties.

as he walks
up the
aisle
I notice his
shoes —
tennis shoes.

a bright
red.

when he
returns he
sits very
still.

as the race
goes off
and
unfolds
he sits
very
still.

the race
finishes
and he still
sits very
still.

the jocks
bring their
mounts
back in.

suddenly he
rises
as a jock
gallops
his horse
by.

"HEY, LAFFIT, YOU
ASSHOLE, WHO
TOLD YOU
THAT YOU COULD
RIDE A
HORSE!"

the jock just
rides his horse
on in,
he's heard it
all
before.
they all
have.

the horseplayer
sits down
biting into his
cigar.

he consults the
yellow
paper
again.

he's going to
give it another
try.

and I am
too.

MAILBAG

a schizophrenic
in Dallas
writes me of his
problems:
he
hears voices,
he's
hooked on
Beckett.
also his shrink
makes him
wait too long
in the waiting
room.

he's supported
by his
mother
and he follows
softball.

he recently
won
2nd prize
in a chili
cook-off.

you ought to come
to Austin,
he writes,
you'd love
Austin.

I file his letter
in with
other letters
from
schizophrenics.

I've been to
Austin.